



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Observes World AIDS Day *Department of Health Urges Testing for At-Risk People*

BISMARCK, N.D. – In observance of World AIDS Day December 1, the North Dakota Department of Health is urging people at risk for HIV/AIDS to get tested, according to Denise Larson, HIV prevention coordinator for the Department of Health.

2008 marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. Established by the World Health Organization in 1988, World AIDS Day serves to further global awareness and focus prevention efforts on the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Observation of this day provides an opportunity for governments, national AIDS programs, churches, community organizations and individuals to come together to demonstrate commitment and action in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

December 1 serves to remind everyone that the U.S. – like other nations around the world – is deeply affected by this epidemic. Over one million people in the United States are HIV positive, and approximately 56,300 new infections occur every year. As of Dec. 31, 2007, 413 cases of HIV/AIDS have been reported in North Dakota since HIV/AIDS surveillance began in 1984. About one-fourth of the people estimated to be HIV positive are believed to be unaware of their infections, underscoring the need for increased efforts to reach at-risk populations with HIV testing and prevention services.

“World AIDS day is great opportunity to raise awareness about the impact the disease has on people, families and communities,” Larson said. “If you do not know if you are infected with HIV, you could be spreading it to others. People need to know how to keep themselves from becoming infected with HIV so we can reduce the spread of this disease in our communities. The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.”

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To support this year's 2008 World AIDS Day theme, *Lead-Empower-Deliver*, the Department of Health urges North Dakotans to take charge of their health and get tested for HIV, especially anyone who has ever put himself or herself at risk for HIV by engaging in risky behavior.

Risky behavior includes unprotected sex, needle-sharing for drug use, or tattooing and body piercing. HIV testing is available at test sites throughout the state. The test sites are staffed by trained personnel who offer free and confidential HIV testing, pre- and post-test counseling, and referrals to those at risk. HIV can be prevented by avoiding or not engaging in risky behaviors.

For information about HIV testing and other HIV/AIDS services, call the North Dakota Department of Health HIV/AIDS Program hotline at 800.70.NDHIV or visit the program's website at www.ndhealth.gov/hiv.

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